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ABSTRACT

Grades, as conventionally conceived and used, are failing the educational system. There are numerous mistakes made in the computation of grades and grade point averages. They become the end of the educational endeavor instead of an evaluation procedure. They are psychologically damaging to two-thirds of the students because of their inability to get the only two good grades (A & B) and they interfere with a good relationship between teacher and student. Concord High School in Wilmington, Delaware has initiated a criterion-referenced system which eliminates grades, grade point averages, class rank, valedictorian/salutatorian distinctions. This system is based on carefully written performance objectives which allow students to progress at their own rate of speed and completing the course when they have achieved the objectives. There are two basic levels in which a student may choose to operate, sufficiency and proficiency. The former designation is for those meeting basic requirements and the latter is designed for those who have unusual motivation, interest and skills and wish to distinguish themselves. Colleges will accept transcripts devoid of grades, grade point averages and class rankings, if the schools can provide adequate information on what the student knows. Surveys of 180 colleges support this premise. Only 10% report that this kind of transcript might interfere with the student's admission. The only thing preventing change in the grading system is developing a strategy for the change process. (Author)

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ED 079378

William J. Bailey, Ed.D.

CRITERION-REFERENCED STUDENT EVALUATION SYSTEMS

The conventional grading system in American secondary education has been something like bad weather. Most people don't like it, but no one seems to be able to do anything about it. However, if we wait long enough, the weather will change on its own accord, but grades will not go away without some planned change strategies.

This paper assumes that the readers are in agreement that the present grading system needs overhauling and consequently there will be no pontifications about the evils of grades. What will be discussed is an example of one alternative student evaluation system, and what the college admissions people are saying about these changes.

It seems both logical and humane that educators should be emphasizing what students have learned, rather than what they have not learned compared to other students. Since the traditional marking system "fails" because it is punitive for most students and because it is inadequate in reporting the kinds of learning experiences students in modern high schools are having, new systems must be devised which will be both positive and accurate. The change must be from the norm-referenced system to a criterion-referenced system.

This kind of evaluation system takes into consideration the emphasis placed on the individual learner, the de-emphasis placed on time as a limitation to learning, and the importance of precise objectives dealing with relevant material. One such system was devised at Concord High School, Wilmington, Delaware, where it is now being implemented.

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This concept is not new, but all educators are surely aware that the implementation progress is very slow at the high school level. Surveys have shown that of the variety of innovations occurring in our public schools, the public is least likely to accept changes in the grading system. However, a rational approach can be taken which will soothe parents, excite teachers, satisfy colleges and encourage students.

Any system of evaluation should be based on values that are important to the organization. The assumptions on which this particular system is based are somewhat universal and are listed below:

1. Learning should be evaluated. Taxpayers, parents, and students deserve to know what progress is being made, and the educational system needs to know its efficiency.

2. An evaluation system does not have to be competitive vis-'a-vis student vs. student. In a sense, the only competition necessary is the student competing with the course objectives.

3. The best kinds of motivations are intrinsic. An atmosphere must prevail in which students are motivated to learn as opposed to working for grades. A positive, self-motivating and mentally healthy environment will in fact result from a non-competitive evaluation system.

4. Evaluations should be individualistic. Since each individual learns at different rates and in different ways and the curriculum has been designed to account for those differences, an evaluation of student progress must be appropriate to his needs.

5. Evaluation should be as specific as possible and based on actual performance.

6. Schools have an obligation to share a student's progress with interested parties at the students' request.

There are seven basic steps to take to implement the six (6) listed assumptions. They are as follows:

1. Decide the content to be learned in general, topical terms.
2. Write concepts for the major topics to be learned.
3. State these conepts in performance objectives.
4. Plan the learning activities that will allow the learner to achieve the stated objectives, allowing for alternative paths.
5. Design the assessment tasks for major activities and objectives. These are usually in the form of tests which are teacher designed but have agreement with the department, team, or administration.
6. Describe the student's performance information on report forms that relate:
   A. FORMATIVE EVALUATION (interim progress reports)
   B. SUMMATIVE EVALUATION (final achievement level)
7. Derive a procedure to evaluate the course based on the achievement of the students.

Formative

Frequent formative evaluation tests and other appraisals will provide an indication of the pace and motivation of the students. They should also give an indication of whether or not the student is making the necessary effort at the appropriate time. The appropriate use of these evaluations will help to ensure that each set of learning tasks is sufficiently learned before subsequent learning tasks are started. A periodic check every nine weeks or less is made and the results are forwarded to parents. Each department should be responsible for developing their own formative evaluations and the necessary forms to record same, but they should all be descriptive in nature.

Summative

The other part of the evaluation system involves the final recording of achievement referred to as the summative evaluation. The summative evaluation is a summary of the work for the entire course, a recording of the achievement level which includes a coding system for college transcripts, and general comments that would be pertinent regarding the individual student, along with recommendations for future work in this area.

The summative evaluation is designed to award credit for achievement on two levels, plus an additional accomplishment/service category that is highly selective. In most cases the student can choose the level at which he or she operates. The basic achievement level, called "sufficiency", denotes that the student has achieved or acquired the necessary skills, concepts, or attitudes that meet course standards. This sufficiency level should be available and attainable to all students given proper placement and normal time allotments, although some may take longer than others. If a student does not achieve this level and drops the course, he receives no credit.

The proficiency level signifies a demonstration of unusual interest, motivation, skills, knowledge, or advanced concepts. This proficiency level should be available and attainable for the majority of the students given (1) the appropriate mode of instruction (materials and teacher); (2) unlimited time; (3) adequate motivation. Proficiency becomes somewhat discriminating because these conditions may be difficult to meet.

The third category, mastery, is an arrangement which starts after or along with the proficiency achievement level but in addition requires that the student contracts to be of service to the discipline. This mastery status should be limited to one or

two courses per student per year. Examples of possible mastery service are as follows:

1) Student aide to a teacher
2) Laboratory assistant
3) Tutoring
4) Special research projects
5) Writing learning packets, producing a.v. aids, etc.
6) Certain kinds of individual study.

The traditional transcript can be used for college admissic purposes. The symbols for the coding system (NC, S, P, M) would be entered as were grades in the past. Each student should have on file the Summative Evaluation form for each course completed. The form contains a description of the course, including major concepts, and specific achievements made by the student in relation to the course. The formats can vary with the department. When advisable these forms can be included with college or job applications. If necessary all of the Summative Evaluations can be sent to interested parties. However, it is more probable that only those that specifically pertain to the student's major interest are necessary. For example a student with primary interests in engineering may send the math and science reports. Of course transcripts still contain the regular test scores and faculty recommendations, but there is no grade point average or class rank with this system.

When considering changing the grading system, a school would obviously follow their normal strategies for change which hopefully would include involvement with students, parents, teachers and other interested parties. The secret to the change process in studen. evaluation, however, is very predominately placed in the

college admissions question. If you can change (improve) your student evaluation system and not drastically affect the colleges acceptance of those students, then you are well on the road to acceptance by parents, students and teachers!

Both formal and informal contact must be made with colleges when initiating grading changes. Surveys can be very helpful in determining the admissions offices reactions. One such survey conducted by James Ferrell, Chairman of Counseling at Concord High School, Wilmington, Delaware, is reported here. - (On the following pages).

The Performance Evaluation College Admissions Survey was mailed to 172 colleges in October, 1972. Over one-hundred (100) have been returned to date and the percentage figures listed below are following a definite pattern.

In reply to the question, "What effect will the new evaluation system have on our graduates chances of being accepted into your college", the college Directors of Admissions responded as follows:

1. No affect on chances of admission — % in reply group: 60%

(examples of replies)

- "Sounds great"
- "Your new evaluation system is quite thorough and won't hurt the chances of your graduates applying here."
- "No effect"
- "Certainly will not have a negative effect ... Your system seems superior to any others we are familiar with."
- "Your system should enable us to make better admission decisions."
- "No effect"
- "Chances will be as good as if a student were evaluated under a letter grade system."
- "We support your proposed system and anticipate no negative effect - in fact it could have a beneficial effect."

2. Little or no effect on chances of admission (with qualifications) — % in reply group: 30%

(examples of replies)

- "May place more reliance on the SAT scores."
- "A special admissions committee will consider your students."
- "We will process your students on an individual basis."
- "Little effect except in the areas where the out-of-state quota is small."

- "No significant effect but we may place more weight on SAT scores."
- "May slow admissions determinations, but should be adequate."

3. May have a harmful effect on chances of admission.

	% in reply group
	10 %

(examples of replies)

- "Large number of applications will make evaluation very difficult."
- "Adverse effect in that we look for type of student who competes with contemporaries."
- "30,000 freshmen applications a year and our out-of-state quota will make your lack of GPA and rank in class difficult for us. However, we will still consider your students for admission."

As can be seen, these preliminary results show that 90 % of the colleges responding indicate that the new evaluation system will have little or no effect on our students chances of admission. Counselors will be working closely with the colleges who indicated they may have difficulty with the new system to make sure that students are not penalized.

Throw away grades - they fail; and college admissions are no longer an excuse for failing to act!

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